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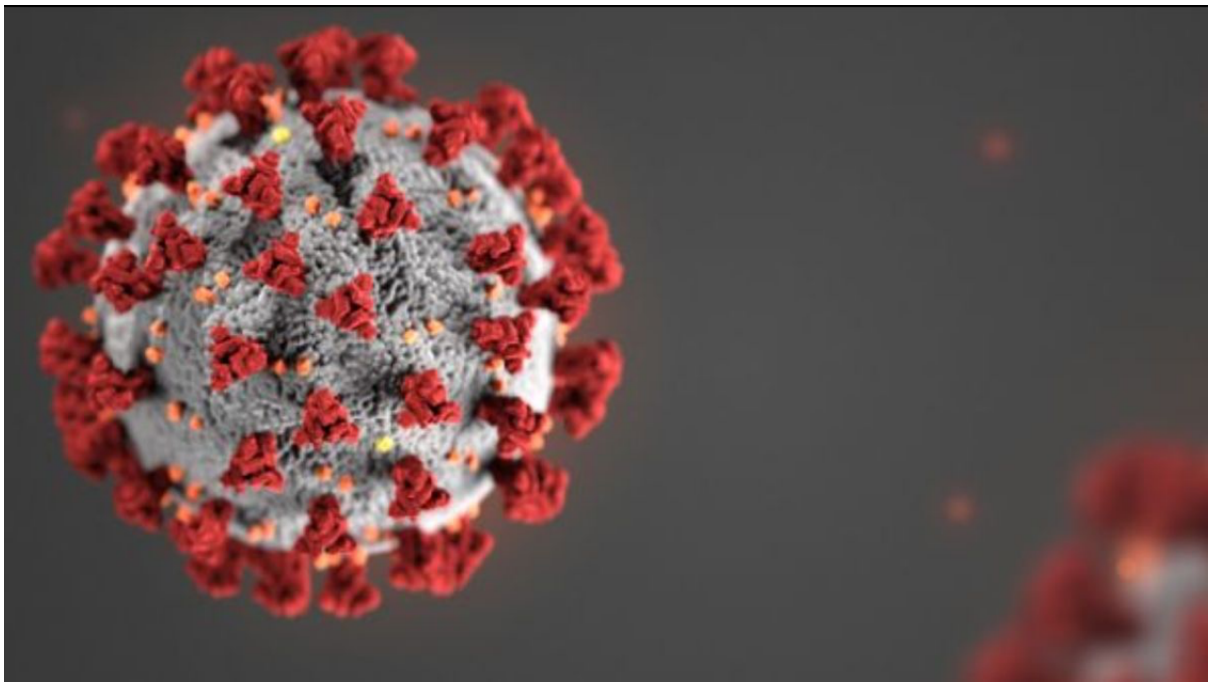
SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
God is still speaking, y'all



COVID-19 and Planning Ahead

Grace to you and peace!

I sincerely hope that you are well! I am receiving questions from pastors about whether worship services should be canceled as the COVID-19 continues to spread in various areas. The Southeast Conference covers a lot of geography and the situation varies – and changes. However, being responsible means thinking ahead and creating plans based on various possibilities. We have not been in this situation before! So it takes some creative as well as practical

thinking!

You have already seen the information that those who are older or have compromised immune systems are most at risk, although others have also had the disease. The recommendation is to not be in large crowds where it can be spread. This of course, speaks to our congregations.

So… a few things to consider:

1. Listen to your local health officials about the risks in your area. The World Health Organization (WHO) has just declared the virus a pandemic globally. But it depends on your area.
2. Tell people that are feeling sick to stay home which shows that they care about other people.
3. Follow the guidelines for worship sent previous or can be found on the UCC website (www.ucc.org) that include not touching and not touching common surfaces (how can the Sunday offering be taken in different ways, etc?)
4. Clean surface areas in the church

In the midst of the practical, don't forget the ministry of listening! People have anxiety and need to talk to express fears and concerns.

HOWEVER, there is also a need for church leadership to work together and prepare for other possibilities. It is better to be proactive than reactive!

1. If you cannot worship together, what are other possibilities for providing spiritual and pastoral care?

- Some churches have the ability to live stream worship services to include those who cannot attend (if this includes music, be sure you have the proper license for live streaming).
- If there is a need to cancel face-to-face services, can the pastor preach and have prayers via live streaming?
- If you cannot live stream, do you have the capability to put sermons, prayers, etc. in an audio format and send the link to parishioners?
- If parishioners have email, can sermons and prayers be written and emailed to people?

2. But there is also a concern about isolation. A benefit of coming to church is to connect with people. So how do you help people not feel isolated?

- Phone calls. Do you have a system in place where there is a group of people on the phone to those who live alone or who might need pastoral care? Or perhaps have a weekly phone call made to all parishioners.
- Gatherings using Zoom, Skype or other technology. These are effective for meetings and keeping groups connected.

3. Consider practical concerns:

- Finances. Church expenses and bills will continue. Encourage online giving or the mailing of checks. Financial folks may need to look ahead at the impact on financial giving.
- Security and building issues. In some areas, a building that does not have much activity can be vulnerable (water running, lights left on, etc.). Who will check on this?

4. Assistance to parishioners.

- If parishioners are quarantined because they have been exposed, are there ways that the church can assist? Delivering food and supplies (of course without physical contact)?
- If schools are closed or businesses suffer, some of your parishioners who depend on regular paychecks may also suffer. They will become victims of the disease in a different way. Consider ways that the church can help - perhaps providing some financial funds to assist.

Beloved Community Church UCC in Birmingham has produced an excellent and detailed policy document that outlines their response to almost every situation. Click here to download the Policy.

Again, this is new for us and there are just a lot of unknowns. We don't want to panic, but we do want to be responsible and caring of our parishioners, our families, our communities, and ourselves.

You will all be in my prayers as we move through these challenging times together! The below is a prayer written by a University Chaplain in the Indiana-

Kentucky Conference. I appreciated it and perhaps you will also. We have been given permission to share it.

Blessings,
Rev. Char Burch, Transitional Conference Minister
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"Oh God, I'm Spinning Out: A Prayer"

Rev. Dr. Hannah Adams Ingram
March 10, 2020

There is so much I do not know
There is so much I cannot see
There is so much I cannot control

In the moments I feel powerless, I will take a deep breath
trusting that I am tasked only with doing my part, not the whole

In the moments I feel unsure, I will take a deep breath
trusting that I am not alone and that together, our wisdom will be richer

In the moments I feel anxious, I will take a deep breath
trusting that there is no depth I can fall out of reach of the Spirit that holds me close

What I do know is that my life and love and worth extend far beyond my work
What I can see is that spring follows every winter and new life pokes out from cold ground
What I can control is my breath and the love I inject into a world so clearly lacking it

"And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love."

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